

VZCZCXRO3217
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #2900/01 2411409
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 291409Z AUG 07
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3085
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002900

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/29/2015
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: SELECTION OF MUTHANNA'S NEXT GOVERNOR

REF: A. BAGHDAD 2783
[B](#). BAGHDAD 2816
[C](#). BAGHDAD 2821

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#). (U) This is a PRT Muthanna Reporting Cable.

[2](#). (C) Summary: On 27 August the Muthanna Provincial Council (PC) met to nominate PC members to fill the position vacated by Governor Hassani's assassination on 20 August. There were three nominees, all of whom are current PC members: PC Chair Ahmed Marzook al-Salal, Director General of Health Dr. Falih Abdul Hassan Sukr, and Abdul Hussein Mohammed Al-Dhalimi, head of ISCI in Muthanna. The first two candidates are the front-runners, with Marzook the most likely to prevail in the selection process beginning on 29 August. End Summary.

Battle Lines Drawn According to Tribe, Not Party

[3](#). (C) Dr. Falih and Ahmed Marzook have the strongest support and will likely be the final two candidates standing when then runoff voting begins on 29 August. Abdul Hussein of ISCI was nominated only because Governor Hassani had ISCI/Badr affiliations and Abdul Hussein was the only ISCI candidate who could replace him (the handful of other ISCI/Badr members are either too weak or, in the case of Muthanna's Badr commander Sayyid Qassim Hassan Auda, are in Iran receiving cancer treatment). Abdul Hussein will almost certainly be brushed aside by the superior tribal support behind Falih (Zayad tribe) and Marzook (Albu Hassan tribe). Since 27 August, battle lines have been drawn between the two sides, with inducements and threats offered to wavering and undecided PC members. The threat of lost patronage for PC members supporting the losing side is obvious, and there is also fear that one or both sides may resort to violence and intimidation. For those PC members too weak to protect themselves against violence from either camp (an estimated 13 out of the 31 members likely to vote), they will delay a decision until they can predict who will win and then seek safety by joining the victor-to-be.

The Reluctant Technocrat As Governor?

[4](#). (C) Dr. Falih is being backed by former PC Chair Mohammed Radi Al-Zayadi and former PRDC Chair Mohammad Arboud Al Zayadi, both of the powerful eponymous tribe that dominates the capital city of Samawa. Dr. Falih, himself a Zayadi tribesman, is not hungry for the position. But Mohammed al-Zayadi and Mohamed Arboud overcame Falih's

reluctance and are orchestrating his campaign from behind the scenes, using wealth likely amassed from embezzled and extorted reconstruction funds to buy votes. Zayadi and Arboud hope Falih will be their loyal figurehead if he wins. Dr. Falih enjoys wide respect on the PC for having steered Muthanna's Health Dept to the best ratings of any province in Iraq, after being appointed by Da'wa two years ago. (He was not previously a Da'wa party member and has no allegiance to the organization.) Dr. Falih may also capitalize on frustration with the retaliatory violence of the Albu Hassan tribe (Reftel).

Let's Keep The Governorship In The Family

¶5. (C) PC chair Ahmed Marzook benefits from his affiliation with the Albu Hassan tribe, which he shared with the late Governor Hassani. The tribe, one of the strongest in and around Rumaytha, is demanding that Hassani be succeeded by one of its members, and is issuing veiled threats of violence against those who refuse to support their candidate, Marzook. Like Dr. Falih, Marzook's party affiliation is only skin deep. Prior to PC elections in 2005, he was the head of Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress party in Muthanna, but he switched to Da'wa when it became clear that he needed Islamic votes to be elected. Given that the new Governor may be limited to a caretaker role in the remaining months before provincial elections, Marzook's incumbency as PC Chair leaves him well placed to attract support from those who support the status quo. Marzook's supporters also turn the tribal violence argument on its head, saying that the Albu Hassan tribe ought to be rewarded for its restraint following Governor Hassani's

BAGHDAD 00002900 002 OF 002

murder (Septel). (Note: The point is not that their burning of buildings has been an act of moderation, but that they could go on a rampage if they are not appeased with the governorship. End Note.)

Muthanna's Idiosyncratic Electoral Math

¶6. (C) In Muthanna, party labels are flags of convenience, and tribal identities and personal relationships are better predictors of behavior. Consequently, counting votes on the PC is challenging because decisions depend on private calculations of self-interest rather than party labels. Of Muthanna's original 41 PC members, four are now dead, and a further six will almost certainly not vote because they have removed themselves from PC business (this includes the Deputy Governor who has recused himself in order to keep his position). Of the remaining 31 votes, the winner needs 16. Dr. Falih can count on the votes of eight PC members (including himself), four of whom comprise the Zayadi-owned clique, and the remaining three of whom are strongly anti-Marzook. Marzook, on the other hand, has a base of six votes (including him) that support him either because they are from Governor Hassani's Rumaytha-based faction or because they are strongly anti-Zayadi. The remaining 17 PC members are on the fence: they are either for sale to the highest bidder, or they will flock to the side that seems most likely to win to protect themselves from reprisal.

Endgame

¶7. (C) Comment: PC Chair Ahmed Marzook has the best chance to prevail in either the second or third round of voting. Nevertheless, many PC members remain undecided and Dr. Falih could win if the Zayad tribe mobilizes its resources effectively to support his candidacy. The result

may occur as early as 29 August or, more likely, as late as 2 September. The winner will inherit a festering security problem in which quarterly JAM skirmishes with ISF and now overt JAM-Badr tensions threaten to plunge Muthanna into greater instability. The new Governor will need to threaten, cajole, negotiate, and fight his way through this ongoing conflict despite being a lame duck, with provincial elections looming on the horizon. He will be less powerful, less wily, and certainly less influential at the national political level than his predecessor, Hassani. The gravest consequence for Muthanna and for the PRT is that the forceful anti-JAM chief of the Criminal Intelligence Unit, Col. Ali Najm Mutasher, will be without the top cover in Baghdad to stave off Sadrist attempts to transfer or sack him, which Hassani prevented repeatedly in the past by appealing twice to Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, once to Ammar al-Hakim, and once to Maliki himself. The PRT will actively engage with, and attempt to empower the new Governor; he will need all the assistance he can muster. End Comment.
CROCKER